

ANIMAL HEALTH INFORMATION

Bioterrorism Advisory for Farmers

MA Department of Agricultural Resources, Division of Animal Health, Biosecurity and Dairy Services
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FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ANIMAL HEALTH, BIOSECURITY AND DAIRY SERVICES

It would appear that one goal of our terrorist enemies is to interrupt the economic life of our country. Introduction of a highly contagious organism capable of causing widespread disease in livestock or poultry would achieve that result. Animal agriculture is a vital industry in the United States linked to tens of thousands of jobs in related industries such as food processing and retailing through markets and restaurants.

In addition, American livestock producers and processors export over \$6 billion dollars in meat products annually. The occurrence of a foreign animal disease in the United States, introduced through an act of bioterrorism, could effectively reduce or wholly eliminate our export markets in livestock products and disrupt the nation's economy and food supply. Given the active interstate trade of livestock in this country and the highly contagious nature of some biological agents such as foot and mouth disease, no area of the country is immune. Foot and mouth disease introduced into Massachusetts on a Monday could be disseminated through much of the nation by the end of the week.

In light of these concerns, we offer the following recommendations:

- Livestock keepers should reevaluate security on their premises, particularly with regard to the risk of intruders entering the premises at night. Animal houses, feed storage facilities, fertilizer storage areas, watering tanks, and milk houses should be made secure so that they can not be tampered with at night.
- If possible, animals maintained at pasture should be housed. If this is not feasible, then the animals should be visited daily, a head count made, and any signs of illness noted.
- All animals on the premises should be inspected daily to evaluate their health. Any unusual or unexpected problems should be recognized and a veterinarian called right away to examine the animals. Signs of disease of particular concern are sudden deaths, high fevers, abortions, blisters or sores around the mouth and feet, or any obvious changes in behavior or coordination.
- Heightened biosecurity measures should be in force. Ideally, closed herds or flocks should be maintained. If animals must be bought, try to acquire them from other closed herds or flocks rather than from dealers or auctions. All purchased animals should be isolated in a separate building for at least 10 days before turning in with the existing herd or flock. This will ensure that animals incubating highly contagious diseases will be detected before they expose other animals.
- Do not allow strangers on the premises. Require visitors to wear boots and coveralls and place disinfectant footbaths outside animal housing. Do not allow outside vehicles into areas occupied by animals.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please call the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Division of Animal Health, Biosecurity and Dairy Services at 617/626-1795.